DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 236 500 CG 017 051

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TITLE Psychiatric Psychopathology: A Practicum Approach.
PUB DATE [83]
NOTE 8p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Clinical Psychology; *Clinical Teaching (Health Professions); *Counselor Training; Course Descriptions; Graduate Students; Higher Education; Mental Disorders; *Practicums; Psychiatric Hospitals; *Psychiatry
IDENTIFIERS *University of West Florida

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the University of West Florida graduate level, didactic/experiential course in psychopathology which has been offered since 1975 to introduce clinical psychology students to the applied and practical aspects of psychiatry. Elements of the basic practicum course are described: (1) each student is assigned to a psychiatrist on a psychiatric unit, and makes rounds two mornings each week to observe psychiatrist-patient interactions; (2) a specific disorder is studied each week; (3) all students meet in a seminar every second week; (4) on alternative weeks students attend a professional psychiatric lecture; and (5) students write a weekly report. Goals and benefits of the course are listed including observation of clinical symptoms and techniques; familiarity with psychotropic drugs and their effects; ability to differentiate types of mental illness; confidence and comfort in interacting with pscyhiatrists and mental health settings; and an awareness of the range of professional techniques available. (Formal evaluations of the course indicate that students find the practicum course valuable, especially for learning about psychotropic drugs and the diversity of psychological disturbances). (WAS)

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Psychiatric Psychopathology: A Practicum Approach

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CG 017051

Running head: Psychiatric Psychopathology

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Abstract

This article describes a didactic/experiential course on psychiatric approaches to psychopathology. Students go on "rounds" with a local psychiatrist at the city hospital. Psychiatric interventions, treatment modalities,and patient response to psychotropic medication are observed. In addition to the practicum experience, students meet as a seminar group to expand on individual experiences. Some didactic exercises are intergrated into the course format. This nontraditional approach has proven effective over the past eight years based on evaluations of both students and psychiatrists.

Psychiatric Psychopathology: A Practicum Approach

A graduate level didactic/experiential course in psychopathology has been offered at The University of West Florida since 1975. The focus is to introduce clinically-oriented psychology students to the applied and practical aspects of the field of psychiatry and entitled "Practicum in Psychiatric Approaches to Psychopathology." This approach is a novel endeavor in light of the professional cleavage between the field of clinical psychology and psychiatry. During the post-war era clinical psychology's identity emerged from the hallmark of psychodiagnostic assessment into the professionally prestigious role of psychotherapy. With the advent of this shift in professional practice, clinical psychology threatened the long-standing foundation of psychiatry's reign in the diagnosis and treatment of psychological disorders.

To make matters more complicated, clinical psychologists have directed attention towards neo-behavioral approaches (e.g., cognitive-behavior therapy; community psychology) which depart from traditional clinical orientations. Meanwhile, psychiatry has maintained its focus on the psychodynamic/medical model as the basis for assessment of the vast spectrum of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral problems. Of course, the newly revised Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the APA (DSM III) has attempted to clarify and differentiate more accurately clinical disorders. Further, the mental health field has today greatly expanded in terms of practitioners (e.g., social workers, nurses, counselors, rehabilitation specialists), client populations (e.g., learning disabled, the aged), and various psychotherapeutic modalities. Thus, the task of clinical educators, to provide a comprehensive approach toward the field of psychopathology, has become more complex over the years. For example, just ten years ago there were but a handful of texts on the subject of psychopathology. This list has now proliferated to include subjects in clinical assessment, behavior analysis,

cognitive appraisals, and psychiatric foundations of both psychodynamic and neo-freudian orientations, not to mention the new advances in neuropsychology and psychopharmacology. It is no surprise, therefore, that the integration of a psychological/psychiatric model as the basis for a "practical" course in psychopathology would be both challenging and nontraditional.

Over the past eight years the course, "Practicum in Psychiatric Approaches to Psychopathology" has been modified and hopefully improved to foster a unique practical learning experience for students interested in gaining insight into the practice of psychiatry.

Format. The basic practicum course outline is organized as follows: (a) Each student (total N = 10) is assigned to a psychiatrist on the psychiatric unit at a city hospital. Students make "rounds" two mornings each week and observe the interaction between the psychiatrist and patient, while focusing on symptoms as well as therapeutic intervention, including effects of psychotropic medication. (b) Each week a specific psychiatric disorder is assigned to be studied and researched. The student focuses on the designated disorder in observing characteristics and symptoms of patients. (c) The entire class meets every other week as a seminar group for the purpose of exchange of ideas, as well as open discussion based on practical experience and assigned readings. The instructor acts as facilitator. (d) On alternative weeks, each student attends a professional psychiatric lecture in the community. (e) A weekly written report, based on the practical experience on the ward is required. The instructor evaluates and gives feedback on the report. (f) A text on psychiatric theory and practice with a psychodynamic orientation toward various clinical entities is utilized. Also, the DSM III is used as a reference guide and manual. In addition, an extended reference list of texts in the areas of psychopathology, abnormal personality, and psychiatric approaches is available as supplemental reading.

(g) Lastly, each student presents a formal presentation to the class on a specific psychiatric disorder; this presentation is based on research data retrieved from the literature.

Course Goals & Benefits. Within the above course context, the following goals are hopefully achieved: (1) Intense observation of clinical symptoms and psychiatric techniques. (2) Familiarity with popular psychotropic drugs administered, and the effects of such drugs on subsequent patient behavior. (3) The ability to differentiate between various organic, psychotic, neurotic, and personality disturbances. (4) The formulation of a dynamic framework for various types of emotional and behavioral disorders, as well as an understanding of psychiatric manifestations of organically based syndromes. (5) An appreciation of the range of professional techniques available in interacting with seriously disturbed individuals. (6) Confidence and comfort in interacting with psychiatrists in various mental health settings. (7) A fostering of one's identity as a clincian through interaction with professional role models. (8) An awareness of the current state of research in psychopathology.

Evaluation. The formal evaluations of the course,as well as the students' spontaneous feedback indicated that a practicum approach is extremely valuable. Of the 100 students who have completed the course, one third stated that it was the best graduate course they had ever taken; the remaining students consistently ranked the course as outstanding or superior. More specifically, the students were impressed with how much they could learn about psychotropic medication in a relatively short period of time. For the first time the students realized why it was important for counselors and psychologists to be knowledgeable in this area. Further, the students gained an appreciation of the diversity of psychological disturbance. Most of their clinical experience had previously occurred with individuals not seriously disturbed; as a result,the exposure to the psychiatric ward was an "eye-opening experience." Conversely, the psychiatrists were able

to gain a more accurate perception of the role of the psychologist. The psychiatrists reported that they were impressed with the students' psychodynamic formulations of mental disorders as well as the comfort the students developed in being around seriously disturbed persons.

Discussion. Positive evaluations of a "practical" teaching framework has been recently reported (Dodendorf, 1981; Halgin, 1982; Sherman, 1982). The benefits gained from the practical experience of interaction with psychiatrists and seriously disturbed individuals are truly noteworthy. Particularly, since the course format deviates markedly from the traditional didactic approach in teaching psychopathology. The students advance their knowledge while learning the realities of psychiatric care. The experience fosters both professional and personal growth. This novel and nontraditional approach has truely been worth the effort for instructor, psychiatrists, and students alike. As stated by Jay T. Shurley in an Invited Editorial in the Journal of Clinical Psychology, (1982) "But there is also no doubt that the psychiatrist and the psychologist can be friends, maximizing the gains for the science and art and practice of mental healing and personality growth and development that are the fruit of long years of successful collaborations and friendly competitions."

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